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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9451
INFO GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE
NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

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SUBJECT: U/S EDELMAN,S OCTOBER 17-18, 2008 DISCUSSIONS IN
RIYADH

Classified By: PM Scott McGehee for reasons 1.4(b)

11. (S) Summary. During October 18 meetings in Riyadh at the General Intelligence Presidency and the Ministry of the Interior, U/S Edelman appealed for Saudi assistance for Lebanon and Yemen, encouraged Saudi Arabia to support a regional Gulf missile defense architecture, and discussed Saudi mediation efforts in Afghanistan. End summary.

12. U/S Edelman met with Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Director of the General Intelligence Presidency during the morning of October 18, and with Prince Mohammed bin Nayif, Deputy Minister of the Interior later in the day. Ambassador Fraker attended both meetings. Others accompanying U/S Edelman were Christopher Straub, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Middle East, Department of Defense, Major General Robert Allardice, Director of Strategy, Plans and Policy, U.S. Central Command, Scott McGehee, Counselor for Political-Military Affairs, U.S. Embassy Riyadh, Colonel Ivar Tait, Defense Attach, U.S. Embassy Riyadh, and Daniel Lally, Missile Defense Agency.

Countering Iranian Activities in Lebanon

13. (C) During his meeting with Prince Muqrin U/S Edelman reported that the USG was focused on countering Iranian activities in Lebanon by bolstering the capabilities of the Lebanese government and armed forces. To this end, the U.S. has recently provided \$410 million in military assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and has set up a joint military committee to work with the Lebanese. U/S Edelman said that during his just-concluded visit to Beirut, he assured the military leadership that the U.S. commitment to support Lebanon will continue through the upcoming season of political change in America.

14. (S) U/S Edelman said that USG is looking to Saudi Arabia and its other allies in the region to actively support Lebanon in its efforts to contain the impact of Iranian activities and influence in the country. In this regard, Saudi financial assistance to the LAF for the acquisition of additional helicopters to improve their air lift and strike capabilities is very important.

15. (S) Prince Muqrin said that Saudi Arabia welcomes the U.S support for the LAF, and that Saudi Arabia has extended some assistance, "but not much." As specific Lebanese needs are identified to the SAG, he would be an advocate to provide assistance, but noted that the GIP is not directly in the loop on approval of such assistance.

16. (C) Prince Muqrin said that Saudi Arabia is concerned about Iranian activities not only in Lebanon, but everywhere, specifically mentioning Bahrain, central Africa and southeast Asia. On Iran,s nuclear activities, he noted that "Sheikh

Qaradawi said it right -- all should be concerned about nuclear developments in Iran." The Saudi view is that all nations have the right to a peaceful nuclear program, but Iran does not have the right to do what it is doing. "We tell them, if they have nothing to hide, let people in." Saudi Arabia does not want to see Iran in possession of any WMD capability.

Gulf Missile Defense Architecture

17. (S) In light of the growing Iranian missile threat, U/S Edelman reported that the USG has been examining how the Gulf countries could enhance missile defenses and has developed a proposal for a regional defensive system. After Dan Lally provided an overview, U/S Edelman emphasized that to be effective, the defensive system protecting the Gulf states needed to be based on a linked regional architecture. The same degree of effectiveness will not be possible were each country to rely on independent systems. Edelman also informed Prince Muqrin that Secretary Gates would be presenting this missile defense concept at the upcoming ISS conference in Bahrain. Prince Muqrin,s questions during the brief focused on missile flight times between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the time required for the proposed system to detect and respond.

Mediation with the Taliban

18. (S) In response to U/S Edelman,s request for Prince Muqrin,s assessment of the mediation possibilities in Afghanistan, the Prince said that Saudi Arabia would not serve as a mediator unless invited to do so, which would require an official letter from Mullah Omar. Muqrin said that during his recent meeting with Taliban officials he was "not diplomatic with them." He told them that Saudi mediation would come with conditions: that the Taliban be willing to lay down arms, accept that Afghanistan is for all Afghanis, agree that once a deal is struck that there would be no quibbling or backsliding, and that no talks would be held in Saudi Arabia. Any exchanges would remain in intelligence channels up to the point that an agreement is reached, and "then they can have their photo opportunity" with the Saudi political leadership. Prince Muqrin added that the Pakistanis would need to be brought into the process, not just at the end, and cautioned that the SAG is still evaluating whether such mediation could succeed.

Saudi Concerns About Yemen

19. (C) U/S Edelman opened his meeting at the Ministry of Interior with Deputy Minister Mohammed bin Nayif (MBN) by describing USG concerns that Al-Qaida could grow stronger in Yemen due to the instability there. He urged that the Saudis consider assistance to help the Yemeni military increase its mobility by procuring a number of M113 armored personnel carriers. He also asked for MBN,s assessment of the ability of President Saleh to adopt the Saudi model of terrorist rehabilitation.

110. (C) MBN agreed that conditions in Yemen could indeed be attractive to Al-Qaida. He observed that Afghanistan is "not a natural place for Al-Qaida," and that they may be getting nervous about the growing prospects for peace there. Al-Qaida operatives in Yemen know that it is easy to travel to Saudi Arabia under the pretext of making the Hajj or Umra to Mecca, and easy to arrange to meet others while there. MBN said that Saudi Arabia is working directly with Yemen to improve conditions in the Yemeni border area that Al-Qaida, smugglers, and criminals might exploit. A joint Saudi-Yemeni council has been set up, presided by Crown Prince Sultan and Yemen,s Prime Minister, to decide where development projects

should be allocated. Virtually all projects will be in the mountain areas near the border -- the concept is to give the inhabitants better lives so that they have "something to lose" if they cooperate with Al-Qaida or criminal elements.

¶11. (C) On the Saudi rehabilitation program, MBN commented that there are limits to the number of Yemenis that can be brought into the Saudi system. If it became widely known in Yemen that Yemenis were being rehabilitated in Saudi Arabia, it could cause great problems for Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Critical Infrastructure Program

¶12. (C) U/S Edelman described USG efforts to begin training for the MOI Facilities Protection Force. MBN expressed consternation that he had 35,000 men he needed to train and equip, and that when he turned to the USG to do this work, he expected that things would move quickly. "Time counts," he said, "I thought you would jump on it." U/S Edelman assured MBN that he would carry that message back to State and DOD and encouraged MBN to continue this discussion during his upcoming trip to Washington.

¶13. (U) This cable was cleared by Under Secretary Edelman.
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End Cable Text